

BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 May 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr K Salmon – Chairman

Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chairman in the Chair for Items 1 - 3

Present: Cllr P Broadhead, Cllr J Beesley, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr C Goodall,
Cllr S Mackrow, Cllr Dr F Rice, Cllr K Salmon, Cllr T Trent,
Cllr O Walters, Cllr C Weight and Cllr M Dower

Also in attendance: Cllr P Canavan, Cllr M Cox, Cllr M Earl and Cllr A Martin

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr L Northover

2. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members

3. Election of Chair

The Vice-Chair thanked Cllr Bartlett for his work in previously chairing the O&S Board over a number of years and it was agreed that the Board place on record its thanks to the outgoing Chair. Board agreed to write to Cllr Bartlett to thank him for the period of service and noted that his work had made a difference.

Nominations were received and seconded for Cllr K Salmon and Cllr P Broadhead for Chairman. Both nominees addressed the Committee to give reasons why they should be elected Chair. Following a secret ballot it was:

RESOLVED that Cllr K Salmon be elected Chair of the Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

Voting: 10 in favour of Cllr K Salmon and 2 in favour of Cllr P Broadhead

4. Election of Vice-Chair

A nomination was received and seconded for Cllr S Aitkenhead for Vice-Chair. There being no further nominations it was:

RESOLVED that Cllr S Aitkenhead be elected Vice Chair of the Baord for the 2025/25 municipal year.

5. Declarations of Interests

In relation to agenda item 11 – Arts and Culture Funding Cllr T Trent declared for the purpose of transparency that he was a registered supporter of the BSO.

In relation to agenda item 11 – Arts and Culture Funding Cllr J Beesley declared for the purpose of transparency that he was a Board member arts Council South-West.

6. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record

7. Action Sheet

The Board agreed to remove the action at 89 from the action sheet as this had been completed.

It was noted that the Cahir would follow up and provide update to the next meeting on item 103a..

It was agreed that the action at 106 should remain on the action sheet to confirm the dates for this issue to be considered.

Items 115 and 116 – would be updated with responses from Cabinet
Item 117 had been completed and could be removed.

8. Information Considered Between Meetings

The Board noted the information circulated.

9. Public Issues

There were no public issues received for this meeting.

10. BCP Complaints Policy

The Portfolio Holder for Customer, Communications and Culture presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was advised that an effective complaints process demonstrates commitment to accountability, fosters trust amongst customers and stakeholders, and provides a structured way to address concerns appropriately and promptly. Recent revisions to the Local Government Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code have introduced changes designed to enhance the efficiency, transparency and responsiveness of local authorities in handling complaints. These modifications affect the operations and policies of all UK local authorities. The BCP Council Complaints Policy has been updated and additionally, a separate new policy has also been prepared regarding Unreasonable Actions, as also recommended by the Local Government Ombudsman. The Board was advised that the Council was also seeking to establish a lead member role for complaints. A number of issues were raised in consideration of this item:

- **Mandatory Guidance:** Clarification was sought on whether the revised Code deviates from mandatory guidance. It was confirmed that the Code promotes best practice, introduces a more robust framework for complaint handling, and includes improved support for staff, such as a reduced response time for Stage 1 complaints.
- **Database Development:** In response to a query about the timeline for replacing the complaints database, it was noted that testing would occur this year, with full implementation expected by the following April. In the interim, complaints are being tracked via spreadsheets.
- **Support for Vulnerable Complainants:** The service recognises that individuals may raise complaints in various ways and is committed to exploring different methods of support for vulnerable complainants.
- **Unresolved Complaints:** Stage 1 complaints are monitored, with more complex cases progressing to Stage 2 and potentially beyond. A record of unresolved complaints is maintained.
- **Financial Implications:** The updated system will be developed using the Council's in-house Dynamics platform, with no additional costs anticipated.
- **Audio Complaints and Contact Attempts:** Clarification was requested regarding the process for resolving complaints via audio and the number of contact attempts made. It was noted that voicemail messages are no longer left, and the wording around this process would be reviewed.
- **Service Requests vs. Complaints:** Where a service request is not addressed adequately or in a timely manner, it may be escalated and treated as a complaint.
- **Role of Ward Councillors:** In response to a query, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that ward councillors may be supported by the Portfolio Holder in the complaints process, if required.
- **Escalation to Stage 2:** If a Stage 1 response is delayed or unsatisfactory, the complaint may be escalated to Stage 2. Enhanced monitoring is now in place, and the central complaints team provides support to resolve issues at Stage 1 wherever possible. A suggestion was made to include a defined timeframe for Stage 1 complaint resolution within the policy, after which escalation to Stage 2 would be permitted.
- **Improved Access:** Efforts were underway to streamline access to the complaints system, including the potential introduction of a direct email option for submitting complaints.
- **Definition of Vulnerable Customers:** It was acknowledged that unreasonable behaviour may sometimes stem from underlying vulnerabilities. The importance of providing appropriate support to help manage and de-escalate such behaviour was emphasised.

RESOLVED that the Board further examine the role of councillors in the complaints process, particularly in relation to ward issues and casework.

Voting: Nem. Con.

The Chair thanked all participants and confirmed that the issues raised would be taken forward.

11. Blue Badge Update

The Portfolio Holder for Customer, Communications and Culture presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. This report provides an update on the recommended actions made in relation to the Informal working group report update submitted to Corporate and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 October 2024. The Board was advised of a number of issues following the last report to the Committee including the response from the Department for Transport. The Board was advised that the Council had taken significant steps to reduce the waiting time for Blue Badge applications, which had previously reached 14 weeks. These measures included the introduction of an interim process to prioritise renewals and the implementation of a new system designed to streamline assessments. The current average processing time was reported to be well within the 12-week national guideline. Issues raised on this item included:

- The Cyclical nature of Blue Badge renewals. Officers confirmed that there was greater planning in place for this issue when would likely reoccur in the next three years. The new system should support addressing the issue when it reoccurs.
- The Council had adopted a less risk-averse approach to applications involving long-term or progressive conditions. A new flagging system was being used to identify applicants who would not require reassessment at renewal, thereby reducing unnecessary delays.
- The process for investigating potential misuse of Blue Badges was outlined. Officers confirmed that reports of suspected abuse were followed up, and where appropriate, referred to the Council's fraud team. It was noted that many disabilities are not visible and that care must be taken to avoid assumptions.
- The Board was informed that while all councils must operate within national guidelines, there is some flexibility in how these are interpreted. The Council had engaged with Dorset Council to learn from their approach, which had informed improvements to BCP's own processes.
- Members queried how residents were informed of the 12-week application timeframe. Officers confirmed that this information was published on the Council's website. However it was acknowledged that not all residents were digitally enabled.
- The Department for Transport's system sends automated reminders to those with email addresses, but there was currently no mechanism for written reminders. Officers advised that they were exploring options to improve communication with residents who are not online.
- The Board also discussed the importance of raising concerns with national bodies. It was confirmed that the issue had been raised with local Members of Parliament. **The Chair requested that the matter also be raised with the Local Government Association,**

particularly regarding the cost of administering the Blue Badge scheme and the limitations of the current data system.

To receive an update – remain as an item on the action sheet. Issue in one years time to see how the situation is developing.

Resolved that an update be provided to the Board in 12 months-time

12. Arts and Culture Funding

The Portfolio Holder for Customer, Communication and Culture presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The report provided an overview of the Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) supported by BCP Council, including their funding arrangements and the strategic importance of their work in relation to health, wellbeing, and the Council's corporate objectives. A number of issues were raised in discussion of this issue including:

- It was clarified that Soundstorm had now become the cultural hub, providing a range of services and developing the partnership between schools and cultural organisations.
- The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's (BSO) work in schools was highlighted as particularly valuable, offering pupils opportunities to engage with music and develop teamwork skills. Members expressed concern that not all schools may be accessing these opportunities and suggested that wider participation should be encouraged.
- An offer was made for representatives from the BSO and Lighthouse to meet with members of the Board, which was welcomed. Members felt this would be a valuable opportunity to better understand the organisations' work and their contribution to the community.
- It was noted that BCP was not currently a priority area for Arts Council England funding. Members discussed the importance of the Council's financial support in helping to leverage additional funding from other sources, especially as national funding was expected to reduce in the future. The Portfolio Holder emphasised that BCP's continued investment sends a strong signal to external funders.
- The Board was informed that NPOs were required to submit quarterly reports to the Arts Council, and that these were also shared with the local authority. However, it was noted that there had been some inconsistency in officer oversight, with three different lead officers for NPOs in recent years. Members welcomed the recent appointment of a new lead officer and the move towards more stable oversight.
- Members discussed the impact assessment for the Arts by the Sea Festival and were advised that these assessments are carried out annually. It was confirmed that Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) would have been completed for any changes to funding decisions. Although direct funding for the festival had been removed from the 2026/27 budget, a staffing commitment remained in place, and plans were being developed for a more community-based version of the festival in future years. Some members expressed disappointment at

the withdrawal of funding and emphasised the festival's accessibility and value to residents.

- Members also raised the issue of other cultural events falling under the Council's events team rather than the culture portfolio, and the need for clarity on how these are supported and communicated.
- A request was made for future reports to include the proportion of total funding represented by BCP's contributions to each NPO, to provide better context for decision-making. Members felt this would help in understanding the scale of the Council's investment relative to other sources.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the O&S Board recognise the value of the NPOs funded by BCP to Health and well-being youth and the local economy and urge Cabinet to protect the funding BCP currently provides.**
- 2. That the O&S Board recommend that Cabinet endorse the work that's been done with schools by the NPOs and recommends that Cabinet take action to encourage all schools to take part.**
- 3. That the O&S Board recommend to Cabinet to explore whether it would be a benefit for a Councillor to be appointed as a member of the Board on any or all of the NPO organisations, and**

Voting: Nem Con

4. That the O&S Board recommend to Cabinet that it ensures that the arts by sea festival goes ahead next year.

Voting: 7 in favour, 1 against, 4 abstentions

The meeting adjourned at 8.50pm and resumed at 9.01pm

Cllr Walters and Weight left the meeting

13. Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Update

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'D' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was advised that the update marked the beginning of the 2026–2027 budget-setting process. The report had been brought forward from July to May to allow more time to identify savings and to increase member involvement in shaping the budget. The report presented an update on Local Government Funding Reforms and the government Spring Statement, aimed to ensure the council presents a legally balanced 2026/27 budget and Proposed a budget planning process and timeline for key financial reports. In the following discussion a number of points were raised including:

- The earlier start to the process was welcomed. It was noted that it would allow for more thorough scrutiny and better planning. It was

agreed that this approach would help avoid last-minute decisions and provide greater transparency in financial planning.

- The Board acknowledged the ongoing financial pressures facing the Council, including rising costs and uncertainty around future government funding. It was noted that the Council would need to continue finding savings while maintaining essential services, and that the MTFP was key in managing these challenges.
- There was a discussion about the importance of clear communication with residents regarding the Council's financial position and the decisions being made. Members emphasised the need for transparency and accountability, particularly where service delivery may be affected.
- The Board also expressed interest in being more actively involved in the budget-setting process going forward. Members supported the idea of regular updates and opportunities to contribute to financial planning discussions, to ensure that the budget reflects the priorities of both councillors and the communities they represent.
- A specific concern was raised regarding the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit. Members noted the importance of the upcoming government announcement on 11 June and the potential implications if the issue was not addressed. It was highlighted that the interest on the DSG deficit could significantly worsen the Council's financial position.
- The Board also discussed the need to include the Council's 2030 net zero carbon target in the risk assessment process and agreed that this should continue to be reviewed as part of the financial planning framework.

14. Work Plan

The Democratic Services Officer presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'E' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was informed of the following updates to the Work Plan:

- The Library Strategy report has been moved to the August meeting.
- A presentation on leisure centre provision will be added to the June meeting in place of a full report.

The Board agreed to delegate authority to the Chair and Vice-Chair to approve any further updates to the work plan.

Concerns were raised about the current proposals for the existing local plan and the proposal to begin a new process. He emphasised the significance of this decision and requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Board be involved. It was clarified that the Environment and Place Committee would review the matter, but the Chair agreed to explore further involvement.

The Board considered two scrutiny requests:

- Parking Enforcement Around Schools - The Board considered a number of options but agreed to add the item to the work plan, with the approach and method to be determined.
- Council Culture and Member-Officer Relations – The Board considered this issue but felt that it would be helpful to receive some further information from the requesting Councillor and therefore deferred this item to the next meeting. It was agreed that the Vice-Chair would liaise on this to determine how it aligns with the work on officer-member relations regarding complaints.

RESOLVED that the work plan including the updates noted above be agreed.

Voting: Nem. Con.

The meeting ended at 10.05 pm

CHAIRMAN